

Interview with Slator Clay Blackiston Jr.

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

SLATOR CLAY BLACKISTON, JR.

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: September 10, 1992

Copyright 1998 ADST

Q: I wonder if you would give me a bit about your background. When you were born, where you were born, about your growing up and your education.

BLACKISTON: I was born in Richmond, Virginia, but actually my parents had been living in New York City. My father was from the Eastern shore of Maryland and my mother was from Richmond. My mother wanted me to be born a Virginian so she went to Richmond. World War I wasn't quite over and she described to me all the troops on the train and everything going down there. I was born in Stuart Circle Hospital in Richmond, Virginia, which is at the beginning of Monument Avenue, Monument and Franklin Streets.

Q: This was about 1917, 1918?

BLACKISTON: I was born September 19, 1918. We lived in New York City until I was four years old, just off Riverside Drive near where the Museum of the American Indian is and also the Hispanic Museum. This is a very bad area right now but then it was somewhat different. We later moved to New Rochelle, New York, lived in an apartment, and ultimately to Scarsdale, New York, where we bought a house on Walworth Avenue. My father was Vice President of Bush Terminal Company. I went to private schools in New Rochelle and then public schools in Scarsdale. Then I went to prep school at St.

Library of Congress

Christopher's School in Richmond, Virginia, an Episcopal School. I was a boarder; they don't have a boarding department anymore. It is a very well-known school in Richmond and in Virginia. Then I went to the University of Virginia and did some work at summer school so I was able to graduate in three years. I also had had a post-graduate course, a year, at St. Christopher's and that gave me credit at the University, so it was possible to graduate in three years.

Q: You graduated in what year?

BLACKISTON: I graduated in 1940 and that was quite fortunate because it meant that the war didn't interrupt my college education. I was working for the Phillip Morris Company in Richmond in a terribly important position. I was taking cartons of cigarettes as they came down a conveyor belt and pushing them in the cases. After some months of that, I decided, although my father had to help me get the job through the Chairman of the Board of Phillip Morris, to join the Navy in December of 1940. I was just thinking about this because I don't think that I ever registered for the draft. I think I had already been signed up for the Navy and therefore that eliminated draft registration. So I went to elimination flight training at Anacostia NAS and learned to fly there, stayed there two months and then went to Pensacola. I graduated in August of 1941 and got my wings from Capt. A.C. Read, who was, you may recall, the pilot of the NC4 that flew the Atlantic in May 1919.

Q: Yes, it was one of the three amphibious airplanes that made it across the Atlantic.

BLACKISTON: There is a long story I could tell about Admiral Towers, then Commander Towers, who was in command of that flight, but he didn't make it. Only Read made it all the way.

Q: Well we'll move along but I would like to get a little feel about what you did in the Navy.

Library of Congress

BLACKISTON: I was a naval aviator and after graduating from Pensacola I was transferred to Corpus Christi; I was an instructor there. I then went overseas—well first I was in a composite squadron which was to fly off those jeep carriers.

Q: Jeep carrier being a small carrier converted from a merchant ship?

BLACKISTON: Yes. I had come up for promotion to Lieutenant Senior Grade and my right eye showed astigmatism. I was grounded for about six weeks while the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery looked at my case. I had about 2000 hours so I was transferred to multi-engine aircraft. I then joined a squadron at Whidbey Island; we then moved around various places in California and finally flew our planes, JMs (Army B2s) to Hawaii where we operated out of Ford Island for some months. Then we went down to the South Pacific to Guadalcanal and we operated all up and down the Slot, Bougainville and that area down to Espiritu Santo. Around February of 1945 we were transferred back to the States, to San Diego. We were there at North Island until the end of the war. We were getting ready to go back out when the war ended. I had been married and my wife joined me in San Diego. She was from Charlotte, North Carolina, and we moved there after I was released from active duty in October of 1945. So I had about five years in the Navy. I got a job in Charlotte, North Carolina, with the Underwood Corporation. I was selling accounting machines and I worked for them about a year and a half, but during that time I took the Foreign Service exams up in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Q: What had inspired you to take the Foreign Service exam?

BLACKISTON: I really didn't know too much about the Foreign Service, but I had read an article in Time, sometime back, about the Foreign Service Institute, and the classes for new officers. I had always been interested in geography and history, as a matter of fact I had minored in history. I knew something about history; I had been to Europe in 1939 with a group of college students from North Carolina and the University of Virginia. So that was probably the motivation. So I took the exam and I think it was two days in Winston-

Library of Congress

Salem. I had been out of school for quite awhile now, almost seven years, so I just barely squeaked through on the exam. However, I did have an advantage that some people didn't have. I knew celestial navigation and some of the questions, which I doubt many of the others knew, I was able to answer. That probably made up to some extent for other things, and I had a fair amount of French at the time. I was notified around January of 1947 that I had passed the exam. Then I was called to Washington to take the orals. Joe Green was the head of the board and at that time, after I had appeared before the board, he told me that I had passed. My wife was there, was in Washington, and we were, of course, terribly happy. Then I was asked to come to Washington for the Foreign Service class. My wife was living in a converted barracks down in what was then called Morris Field in Charlotte—heated with a kerosene stove, pretty primitive. But we had been used to that; out in Washington State when the squadron was out there we were cooking on wood. I was still flying a little bit with the Naval Reserve Unit over in Anacostia, so occasionally I would check out a SNJ and fly down to Morris Field, now Charlotte International Airport. I could land and practically taxi up to the apartment. Our first post was Amsterdam.

Q: Briefly, what was the training like? And who were your fellow officers being trained at the time?

BLACKISTON: Roy Rubottom, later Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs, was in the class; we had a number of these War Manpower people in the class who came in at much higher levels. I came in at the bottom, which was FSO-6, and I think Roy came in as a FSO-3. There were several others of higher grade. I should really get out my picture of the class...

Q: Well I just want to get a little feel for the class; you are saying that it was a mixed group.

BLACKISTON: A mixed group. Some were much more senior; for instance one officer had been assistant Army Attach# in Madrid. He told me that he had been involved with Air Force pilots shot down over France who were able to get across the border into Spain;

Library of Congress

the Spanish government was apparently quite helpful and he would arrange for them to be gotten out of Spain. Everybody had wartime experience. I don't think there was hardly anybody who hadn't served in the military.

Q: Looking at it after you left, did your training help much?

BLACKISTON: I guess it certainly helped, at least for me, because I didn't know much about the Foreign Service. There was a lot of esoteric stuff in there; there was a theory that you could predict political movements by adding up trend lines. Actually we generally laughed at these propositions; I won't mention names but there were several that we thought were fairly foolish, we didn't think these things would be possible. Also we did have training from a man named Smith...

Q: Hoxie [Lee] Smith.

BLACKISTON: ...who was a linguist and that was quite interesting, I thought. He could recognize anybody's accent.

Q: He was quite famous for being able to tell where somebody was from. He had a radio program.

BLACKISTON: I didn't know that. Yes, Hoxie Smith. There was another...well I shouldn't say this because I won't say anything if it's not favorable.

Q: Well you can. We are looking for history, just to get a feel for the times. You don't have to mention names.

BLACKISTON: Well there was this other person I told you about that I guess considered himself a political scientist. But I think generally it...I get a little mixed up between the mid-career course and what we learned in the basic course.

Q: We can move on. Your first post was Amsterdam; in the aftermath of the war?

Library of Congress

BLACKISTON: It was in 1947. You probably know that the winter of 1946-1947 was devastating in Europe; it was bitterly cold. The canals froze, they were using coal and they couldn't move coal on the canals. People suffered. I was not there then, but I got there in the summer of 1947 which was quite a contrast to the winter. It was superb, I don't think it rained from June to September, which is very unusual in The Netherlands—I was in Amsterdam. I remember the Dutch people were in those days, terribly appreciative of Americans. I remember we got off the ship, I had a car—it was the a Ford. We got off the ship, the Veendam, in Rotterdam. We had one child and we had to change his diaper; my wife knocked on the door someplace in Rotterdam and asked if she could come in and change the diaper. They said fine; they were just as nice as could be. So we drove on to Amsterdam, and I was doing the usual vice-consular functions there. Among other people there were Tom McElhiney, Mary Olmsted, and Rufus Smith, who died last year. Tom was Ambassador to Ghana and head of UNRWA, the relief agency for Palestine refugees. Mary was Ambassador to Papua New Guinea, and Rufus was Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs but he was very much involved in Canadian affairs, he was sort of the Canadian expert.

Q: You had a political appointee, Herman Baruch, as Ambassador. What was he like?

BLACKISTON: Well he was really something. We were invited down to the residence on a number of occasions. He had...shall I tell this?

Q: Yes. Please.

BLACKISTON: He had met on the ship coming to the Netherlands a Dutch lady whose name was French, DeChaussee, as I recall, who also had a husband. She was installed as Baruch's hostess, his wife had died. The residence in The Hague was a townhouse, rather attractive. I remember one thing he asked our Consul General, and I was assigned to do; Baruch wanted some caviar; there was a Soviet Mission in Amsterdam and I was assigned to go over there and see whoever was in charge about buying caviar, prices,

Library of Congress

etc. So this was all set up; I went in, big pictures of Stalin, great big hallway, quite an impressive place. I got the prices of the caviar and conveyed it to the Ambassador. Later the Consul in Rotterdam, Herb Olds, told me that he was being pressed for a visa—oh yes, Madam DeChaussee was also a gardener. Baruch wanted to bring her to the United States but he didn't want to marry her at that stage so he was putting the pressure on the Consul in Rotterdam to issue her a skilled agricultural visa, a preference category, and Olds was withstanding this pressure. But I am not sure whether he finally succumbed, because she did come to the United States and they did get married; then, of course, he passed away someplace along the line. Baruch was a very distinguished looking guy with a big beard, a sort of Van Dyke. You know he was Bernard Baruch's brother and he was a doctor. How he got that job I don't quite know but there he was.

Q: Well just to move on, because there are some other parts of your career later on when you got more involved... Your next post was Stuttgart, 1949 to 1950. This must have been a difficult time, because Germany was still basically an occupied country.

BLACKISTON: Yes. I think the currency reform had taken place.

Q: That was actually in 1948 or 1949, I think.

BLACKISTON: Yes. Now Stuttgart was not so terribly bombed; the center of the town had been bombed; the Bahnhof had been bombed but that had been reconstructed. The French had been in there too and they had caused quite a bit of destruction with their troops. They were euchred out of there; the Americans got them out of there and that was all in the American zone. I was just an ordinary vice consul, we had a lot of vice consuls; but later I was head of the visa section. We were not in the Villa Hauf which was the consulate general up on the hill, a requisitioned building. We were in the Zeppelin Bau, which was across the street from the Bahnhof. I also was the head of that; we had, I think, six other vice consuls and we processed regular visas and what they called section 12, that was a category for ethnic Germans. It was a big operation...

Library of Congress

Q: These would be ethnic Germans from the Sudetenland, from Poland, all these places, who left and didn't really have a home.

BLACKISTON: Yes. And we had to check on all these people, and the denazification, and then the Berlin document center—which I can describe but I guess you know about that—to see what their Nazi record was. We did not handle the displaced persons visas; those were handled in separate establishments scattered throughout Germany. The one in our consul district was at Ludwigsburg. Ludwigsburg had a palace; I think Queen Mary, Mary of Teck, used to play there as a child. That's what we did there. We traveled around Germany quite a bit. We had people there, staff vice-consuls who had a counterintelligence background, doing the investigations on these visa applicants. I might just tell one thing that is fairly funny. The letters which we wrote to applicants, or to anybody inquiring about applicants, would have up in the right hand side "In reply please refer to VD," VD being the Visa Division and then there would be a number. We got a letter from a GI objecting to something we had done; his fiancée had applied for a visa and I guess she had gotten this letter "Reply to VD." He wrote this letter to us saying, in part, "I want you to know that my girl has never had VD," and on and on. I thought it was so funny I sent it in to the Reader's Digest; I thought they might print it but they didn't.

Q: This is about the time, 1949 to 1950, when things were happening in Czechoslovakia; Germany was becoming less an occupied country and moving more to an allied status. At the vice-consul level did you see any change?

BLACKISTON: Yes. The nonfraternization policies had all been abolished. I think they still urged you not to buy meat from German butchers, allegedly because they were not sanitary enough, but I don't think people paid too much attention to it. We lived in a house that had been requisitioned but we were very meticulous in caring for the furniture and everything that had been in there. I'll tell too of an indication of the change there. We were transferred to Haiti, I mean had gotten orders for transfer to Haiti. We lived in Degerloch which is up in the hills around Stuttgart, a very nice leafy suburb, in a duplex apartment

Library of Congress

and we had the upstairs which had been requisitioned; downstairs I can't remember whether they were Americans or they were Germans. But we got to know quite a few Germans, actually, quite well. We were having this party in the back yard and we had a little dog named Tuppy; our son, who was about three or four, ran out from the backyard to the front and Tuppy was chasing him. My son stopped before he got to the edge of the street but Tuppy sailed out into the street, and he sailed out past a car which had been parked right at the edge of the driveway. At that particular point a German on a bicycle came by and the bicycle and dog collided, the man was thrown off the bicycle and broke his arm. He then sued me in the High Commission courts saying that he was repairing war damage to his roof and with his broken arm he couldn't do this work; he added it all up in a very meticulous German fashion. These courts were designed to take care of cases between the citizens of the occupying power and the Germans. I couldn't stay there, I was being transferred to Haiti, so I had to hire a lawyer who was accredited to this court. In any event they found against me—I didn't appear—and when I was in Haiti I had to pay some \$550.

Another funny thing, my son had a little German friend; in a neighbor's house there was a chicken coop and they got in the chicken coop and started chasing the chickens around and one or two of the chickens escaped. So he wrote me a letter saying that he couldn't introduce a new chicken to this coup of chickens because they would fight, so he was missing x number of eggs and so forth and he figured out how much I owed him. I think I paid him, I can't remember.

Q: Then you went to Port-au-Prince where you served from 1950 to 1952. What was Haiti like in those days?

BLACKISTON: Haiti was a lot better than it is today. But I can tell you that Haiti was bad. The President was a guy named Magloire. The population then was only four million with ten thousand square miles. There had been a mahogany furniture industry there, initially making furniture; alternately as they cut down all the trees they were just turning

Library of Congress

out mahogany bowls. There was a For#t des Pins, which was supposed to be a sort of preserved area which I guess they didn't cut so much. But Haiti was just a complete disaster. The erosion of the land; as they burned wood for charcoal it increased the erosion. There were a lot of Americans living there though and there were some quite nice houses. We lived up in P#tionville which is at an altitude of about 1200 feet so it wasn't the hot, muggy heat that you got downtown. Of course the Marine occupation of Haiti had lasted from 1915 to 1934 and actually some Haitians would tell you privately that that was the only time that Haiti actually functioned properly. The roads were maintained, the telephone system worked. When I was there the telephone system was strung from tree to tree with nails bent over to hold it up. There was a sizable so-called Syrian population there; they were merchants. They were Palestinians, Syrians, Lebanese and so forth. It was certainly not as bad as it is today.

Q: What were you doing?

BLACKISTON: I was economic officer.

Q: What sort of economics were you looking at?

BLACKISTON: Haiti's main crop is a peasant coffee crop, no plantations. I had a very good friend in the coffee business; he was also an Alcoa Steamship agent. The peasants would grow the coffee and bring it down to Port-au-Prince be sold and they would add stones to increase the weight. This was a game that everybody knew; the stones were removed and the weight was docked. There was also a sisal crop there and, of course, sugar-cane—Haitian-American Sugar Company. There had been a period when they grew pineapples, but that sort of petered out. During the war they had grown a plant, an experimental crop, for use as rubber. So there was a fair amount of economic activity to report on. HASCO, the Haitian-American Sugar Company—has been nationalized now—was the big company in Haiti and we knew the president and its officers quite well. Also the electric company was run by Americans; quite a few Americans ran hotels there. There

Library of Congress

was a hotel called the Ibo Lele which is up above P#tionville, a beautiful view, run by a man named Andre Roosevelt; some obscure member of the Roosevelt family.

Q: As an economic officer how did you deal with the Haitian government? What was your impression and how did you work with it?

BLACKISTON: They were always accessible. You could go and talk to them but they would tell you they didn't have very good statistics. This all gets a little vague for me because of much passage of time so I can't remember. I remember we presented credentials to Magloire because a new Ambassador arrived. He had had an accident in Washington, hit by a car, so he only stayed there about four months as he had to leave for medical treatment.

Q: This was William Decourcy?

BLACKISTON: No, it was Perce Travers, a very kind man. Decourcy had been there; I talked to him before I went to Haiti because he had been an inspector, but he left before my arrival. John Burns was the charg#, he later became Director General of the Foreign Service. He was there most of the time.

Q: Were we concerned about communist movements or any political movements?

BLACKISTON: Yes we were. There was a communist movement, I can't think of the name of the man who was the head of it. Yes we were concerned about that and of course this was the height of the cold war. We probably exaggerated the threat but considering the poverty of the people and the abysmal conditions many of them lived in there was that potential there. We had Guantanamo Bay not far away—our second son was born there because we had an Rh factor problem, my wife and I, and they couldn't handle it in Haiti, although there was a pavilion for Americans where they gave you better treatment than in the rest of the Haitian hospital. But anyway we arranged with the air attach# to fly my wife to Guantanamo. My wife stayed there with a Navy Commander and his wife until she had

Library of Congress

the baby and then came back. We had a naval mission in Haiti headed by a Coast Guard officer; we also had an Air Force mission. Should I speak about this?

Q: Yes, would you.

BLACKISTON: The head of the Air Force Mission was Bob Smith who later became, I believe, a lieutenant general. The head of the Haitian Air Force was named Eddie Roy who was a mulatto and a very personable guy, spoke excellent English. I knew him fairly well; but his big buddy was Bob Smith. They would fly off to the States to Air Force bases where Eddie was apparently perfectly accepted. Bob Smith once told me that they had been someplace in Alabama and I think they were in the men's room and some redneck type says "Smith, gee you're going around with Negroes." And Smith said, "Oh no, he's a Haitian." Roy quickly hands the guy a cigar, "Have a cigar." And they're buddy, buddy. Poor Eddie Roy was later killed by Papa Doc Duvalier's goons. Now I met Duvalier.

Q: He later became known as "Papa Doc."

BLACKISTON: Yes. He was a medical school graduate; a doctor, from the University of Michigan, I believe. And at that time, this was before we had programs like AID—you remember Truman's Point Four program—we had a medical mission, an agricultural mission and an educational mission. This "Papa Doc" worked for our medical mission and I was introduced to him. That was before he had gotten into politics. Should I tell you about some of the problems of the medical mission?

Q: Yes.

BLACKISTON: One of the big problems in Haiti is yaws. I don't know whether you have heard of yaws but yaws is akin to syphilis. The World Health Organization was trying to make a name for itself, at least that is the way we saw it or we heard it from our people in what you might call AID. WHO would make a sweep through the countryside inoculating everybody against yaws and there would be remarkable improvements. But our people

Library of Congress

said this was not a permanent cure, you have to return to inoculate them subsequently so our people followed that approach and there was a big conflict between WHO and the Americans on how you treat yaws. I don't know, I am not a doctor obviously, but it seemed to me that the American approach made more sense.

Q: You left Port-au-Prince in 1952, did you go...?

BLACKISTON: I went to the Department.

Q: Yes, there is sort of a gap because you didn't go to Jerusalem until 1953.

BLACKISTON: Yes, I went to the mid-career course.

Q: But you went to Jerusalem in 1953 and you served there until 1956. Was that just a regular assignment or did you ask for it?

BLACKISTON: I can't remember but I was very happy to go there and I found it fascinating, although we had a lot of problems there which maybe you know about.

Q: Could you explain what the situation was like at that time?

BLACKISTON: The situation was this: the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948 had left a situation in which there was no peace, just Armistice Agreements between Israel and the four surrounding countries, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. The Lebanese border was the same border it had been, but on the Syrian border there were three demilitarized zones (DZs), where, when the fighting ended, Arab villagers were still living. The terms of the Armistice Agreement were that life in the villages should go on as before; they shouldn't be interfered with. The Israelis, practically from the beginning, started encroaching the DZs and ultimately drove the Arab residents from the Hula area DZ and the two up at the headwaters of the Jordan. They also would fire on Syrian fishermen; there was a section of DZ that was only about 30 feet wide between the eastern edge of the Sea of Galilee and Syrian territory and the Golan Heights. The Syrian fishermen would

Library of Congress

drag their boats across this strip of land and fish as they had been doing for centuries and this would cause trouble. On the Jordan border the Armistice Agreements were negotiated by the Arab Legion, as it was then called. It was officered by British officers; Glubb Pasha was head of it, and the brigades were headed by British officers. And when the Armistice Agreements were signed they were negotiated by British officers who really didn't know the terrain that well or the geography, so the Armistice border was drawn in such a way that villages were cut off from their land, instead of drawing the border so that it would encompass these communal lands. So many of the villagers would come over into what had been their lands to harvest crops, graze their sheep and so on. This would lead the Israeli border police to fire and sometimes kill them. Occasionally infiltrators from Jordan would cross into Israel and attack Israeli settlers. While I was there there was a famous attack on a town called Qibya led by Arik Sharon; it was a village at the end of a road projecting into Israel. In retaliation for some infiltration from Jordan, the Israelis made a massive night attack on this village of Qibya blowing up houses and killing some 60 people. The Israelis followed the same tactics—there were a whole series of these things, Qibya is one of the best known—they would encircle the town, mine the road (there would just be one road) on the Jordan side and then put these satchel dynamite charges against the buildings with the people inside. I think fifty-six people were killed. Then when the Arab Legion would come down the road, they had no other way to go as it was rocky terrain, the trucks would hit these mines. I was there the morning after with another FSO, Cleve Fuller; there is a picture in *Life* taken of us standing amid the bodies and describing us as UN observers. So this was the pattern of things and there were many of these places. My job included liaison with the UNTSO observers. Well, I lived on the Jordan side. Shall I describe all this?

Q: Yes, please do.

BLACKISTON: Is this getting too long?

Q: No, No. This is what I want, particularly this Jerusalem bit.

Library of Congress

BLACKISTON: Let me describe the situation in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was also divided by the armistice line. There was the old city, which was the walled city, plus an eastern part of Jerusalem that was in Jordan; the new city was in Israel. The people of Jerusalem during the Arab-Israel war had defended the old city themselves, just the local inhabitants, but they were going to be overwhelmed so they called for help from TransJordan's King Abdullah. The Arab Legion came and did defend the old city so that it was not captured by Israel. We had one consulate general because the United States supported the UN partition plan which called for an Arab and Jewish state—with a corpus separatum, which included Jerusalem and Bethlehem, an area that was to be internationally administered because of its significance for the Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths. Of course this never came to pass but we still, as we do today, support the legal fiction of it. At that time US passports in Jerusalem said Jerusalem, Palestine; neither Jordan nor Israel. Now that has been changed, I believe. So we had the Consulate General; the main office of the Consul General was on the Israel side on Mammilah Road; across from us was a Muslim cemetery that the Israelis bulldozed. There was an office on the Jordan side and that is the one that I headed. We could cross back and forth during the daytime, and we did; the general public could not. Consular personnel could cross at night but you had to ask for special permission; sometimes we did go for a reception or something on the Israel side.

We had UN observers who were assigned to ensure that there were not violations of the armistice agreement, or if there were to investigate who was responsible. It was called the UN Truce Supervisory Organization, and they were on all four borders. We had what is known as Mixed Armistice Commissions for each of these borders; there was what they called the HKJIMAC which meant Hashemite Kingdom Jordan-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission—there were similar MACs on all the other borders. The observers came from the United States, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Canada, and maybe Norway, I've forgotten. My job was to get to know these officers and to report on incidents, so I got to know them very, very well. The MAC met in a building that was in a no-man's land between one part of Jerusalem and the other. There was some cooperation between

Library of Congress

the Israelis and the Jordanians with regard to mosquito control, because water would sit there and if they didn't do something about it it would affect both sides so they did do that much. There was a firing incident in Jerusalem while I was there and the Jordanians—this is on Nablus Road which comes out of Damascus gate going towards Nablus and would have gone on toward Damascus if there had not been a division between the countries. The Jordanians erected a wall which was about eight feet high, I guess, maybe more, so that in any firing from the Israel side the passerby would be protected. They were not using artillery but mortar shells. I am rambling a little here, but I might cite one case. We would get these Americans there, I guess you would call them hippies today—they were going to make peace. I remember one day some guy had been in to the consulate to see me, then he'd gone over—you could with permission cross over to the Israel side. One morning, there were loopholes in this wall, this guy walked into no-man's land and an Arab Legion man shot him dead right out in front of the consulate. Of course he should not have been there but he was a harmless guy. I remember my son calling me, and I looked outside and there was the guy dead.

I may jump a little bit; there is so much that happened there. You remember the Eisenhower Doctrine?

Q: The Eisenhower Doctrine was essentially what?

BLACKISTON: The idea was you would sign up the countries of the Middle East; if they adhered to this doctrine of objection to communism then they would get support, military assistance, from the United States. Lebanon signed up for it but nobody else. Also there was an attempt to get Jordan; well we even tried to get Egypt, into the Baghdad Pact — which of course we never joined. We joined the political committee and the military committee, I have sort of forgotten about that. But there was an attempt to get Jordan into the Baghdad Pact in 1955 and this really blew their stack. There was a farm near Jericho run by Musa Alami & Project, it was quite famous; it used to get a lot of publicity in Reader's Digest. Musa Alami was a Jordanian who got money from Iraq for the farm

Library of Congress

which trained Palestinian youth in agriculture. It did a good job. That was at the time that Iraq was still more or less under British influence with King Faisal II on the throne.

Q: The King was assassinated.

BLACKISTON: That was later, when Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew him in 1958. That was later, Nuri Said was the Prime Minister of Iraq who was pro-British. The Jordanians, the mass of the people, particularly the Palestinians, reacted very unfavorably to this attempt to get them into the Baghdad Pact. There was a big refugee camp down in Jericho which is in the Jordan Valley. The refugees came out of the camp and were attacking and tearing apart this Musa project, which was doing good work, actually. They trained students in agriculture, raising chickens and such, and they would sell their turkeys and so forth; but they were getting money from Iraq, Iraq being considered as opposed to Palestinian interests. So they tore the place apart. There were also some Mennonite Missionaries down in the refugee camp, and these missionaries—well I think they accused them of trying to distribute Bibles. Whether they did or not I don't know but we got a call and I had to go down there in a jeep. These people were barricaded in their house and I brought them up to Jerusalem. Then one thing led to another and by the next year, early January, we heard rumors of an attack—I've got a paper on all this part, I don't know whether you...

Q: When the time comes you might include that.

BLACKISTON: Well it's long, I just looked it up; I just realized I had it. So I am doing it off the top of my head here.

Q: That's all right.

BLACKISTON: In January 1956 there were rumors of an attack on the Consulate. So we brought over three marines from the Mammilah Road Consulate General and put up concertina barbed wire on top of the fence around it. We had several attacks on the Consulate, but the big one came one day, and I would have to look up the date, when

Library of Congress

there was maybe a thousand people milling around...this main attack was in January, I guess, with a large crowd outside and we had three marines inside. The crowd was calling to pull down the American flag and our gunnery sergeant, called back, saying, "It ain't time for colors yet." So this mob started breaking in; we had two doors, one a side door, the marine broke out the upper panels and was standing on a chair so he could fire his .38 revolver. My wife and two kids were up on the second floor hiding behind clothes' bags. There was a stairway up to the residence quarters from the side door and some guy had broken out a panel and was getting ready to step into the hallway leading upstairs. I had a shotgun, an automatic shotgun that my father had left me, and so I fired at this guy and he left or was pulled out or something. Anyway this went on for some time; it was pretty hairy! Finally the Arab Legion brigade sent troops down and drove these people away.

Q: Hadn't there been any protection before? Why hadn't they sent troops before?

BLACKISTON: I guess it was the political situation there. You see Glubb Pasha had not been dismissed yet and it was pretty dicey. I was telephoning the governor of Jerusalem asking for protection. There were a number of people killed in this incident. I have upstairs the statement of, I think it was, Brigadier Gallatly, who gave me a figure of how many were killed; I have forgotten what it was. So this situation was not very good, it is not a normal thing and shortly after I was transferred.

Q: Did you have any dealings at all with the Embassy in Tel Aviv?

BLACKISTON: Oh yes, I am glad you asked me this. I didn't have direct dealings with Tel Aviv, but we had a constant battle with the Embassy; with the Army attach# reporting Israeli versions of border incidents, which were not true. We were getting the facts from the UNTSO observers and the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Supervisory Organization, who first was a man named General Vagn Benecke, a Dane. He had played a substantial role in spiriting Danish Jews across the Kattegat to Sweden. and yet this man, because he reported the truth, was just castigated by the Israelis. Now his

Library of Congress

successor was a General Burns, a Canadian Major General who had been in command of a Canadian division during the Second World War. We got to know him quite well too; as a matter of fact I visited him some years ago when I was up in Ottawa. I am sure he is dead now. The Embassy in Tel Aviv, we considered, as constantly presenting the Israeli viewpoint. You see the first American Ambassador to Israel was a guy named McDonald who was confessedly a Zionist; no attempt at balance or anything. The Consul General was constantly getting flak from the Embassy in Tel Aviv, not from the Embassy in Amman. That was the situation.

Q: What was your impression of the Israelis at that time?

BLACKISTON: Aggressive; talking peace but not really wishing it. Nothing much has changed.

Q: Did you feel that your or the Consul General's reporting was inhibited because of domestic political pressures?

BLACKISTON: No, I do not think so. Actually, I was thanked. I will give you one example. The Israelis were complaining bitterly, because on the Mount of Olives, which was on the Jordanian side at that time, there was a Jewish cemetery and many of the gravestones had been knocked down during the war, not officially but by individual Arabs who had broken these stones. That's where this guy Robert Maxwell who either fell or jumped off his yacht off the Canary Islands was buried in an almost official Israel funeral.

Q: A famous British financier of Jewish background; Maxwell, I think.

BLACKISTON: Maxwell, is buried there and there have been allegations that he was a Mossad agent. So these gravestones had been knocked down by Arabs and the Israelis were complaining bitterly to the US government about this. But I had traveled all over Israel and just right across the street in the Mamillah cemetery, which was a Muslim cemetery, I watched and took pictures where they bulldozed the whole thing. So I wrote a

Library of Congress

dispatch and sent in pictures, making the point that yes, Arabs had knocked down these graves but this was not done by the Jordan government, whereas what had transpired on the Mammilah cemetery was an act by the Israeli government, and I drew a contrast there. Actually I have been all over Israel and they have destroyed graves and Muslim shrines all over the place.

Q: You left there in 1956. Was this before the Suez crisis and war in October of 1956?

BLACKISTON: Yes, they got me out of there because it probably wasn't good for me to stay there. So I went back and was on what was then called the Jordan-Israel desk, for a year. The experience in Jerusalem had interested me in the Arab world, so I applied for Arab language school.

Q: In your time on the Jordan-Israel desk who was the head of it?

BLACKISTON: Don Bergus.

Q: You were there during the Suez war weren't you? How were we treating that?

BLACKISTON: Yes, and I remember Bergus coming back from a meeting when the Egyptian Ambassador met with Dulles—you remember the financing of the High Dam? You know what happened there was that we had initially offered to help finance it; Dulles initially tried to be evenhanded. Then he began to see Nasser as a real problem in the area, that he was playing footsie with the Communists. So he changed his tune and told the Egyptian Ambassador on that day that we were not going to finance the High Dam and of course that is what led them to go to the Soviets. I remember Bergus coming back and telling me, he had taken the notes, about this. May I make a comment of my own?

Q: Yes, please do.

BLACKISTON: I think it was a mistake to refuse, in one sense. On the other hand, two things: One is that there is an environmental problem with the High Dam and the second

Library of Congress

is that this would have required annual increments of aid and given the makeup of the US Congress I don't think that a subsequent administration could have withstood the pressure. It probably would have been worse to say you are going to go ahead and start and then have to withdraw someplace along the line. That's the way it was.

Q: Did the Suez war get to the desk or were things on too high a level at that point?

BLACKISTON: No, I knew quite a bit about this because Dulles had this really crazy idea, you may remember. He concocted this idea when Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company. When I first heard about it everybody thought it was really wild. You remember the Suez Canal Users Association? Well he cranked up this Dane who was supposed to be the head of it and all these people, I didn't quite understand it, we're supposed to run the Suez Canal. Well the likelihood of Nasser accepting this was—well, it died aborning. So there were a lot of things going on that were interesting at that time.

Q: At that time, obviously things have changed a great deal, on the Jordan-Israel desk did you feel an obviously heavy Jewish lobby pressure?

BLACKISTON: It was terrible. I remember...was that then or later? Well anyway it doesn't matter; I'll give you an example. Maybe when I was back in the State Department later. Bob Strong was the Director of Near East Affairs, he was later Ambassador to Baghdad. He was going to have a briefing for members of the American press on developments in the Near East, only Americans. Now there was a guy named Cy Kennan—have you ever heard the name?—who is the founder of IPAC.

Q: IPAC is the Israel Public Affairs Committee, which is the preeminent...

BLACKISTON: It is an agent of the Israel government. Strong denied Kennan, who is an American citizen, the right to attend this briefing, and as they say, "stuff really hit the fan." Poor Bob, I think he was right, but he had to back down. Yes, there was constant pressure.

Library of Congress

Q: How were your reports from Tel Aviv and our reports from the Embassy in Amman treated? And from the consul general in Jerusalem? Did people like Don Bergus who were supervising, in any of these disputed matters view the Embassy in Tel Aviv as being...Did you find that there was an Israeli advocate in Tel Aviv?

BLACKISTON: Yes.

Q: And Arab advocates in the other places where the Arabists were?

BLACKISTON: Well this is the thing, that these are Arab advocates. We who are Arabists deny this. We are not Arab advocates, we are US advocates. We see American interests other than just the complete subordination to the wishes of Israel and the Israel lobby. That's where these people get labeled anti-Semitic and so on; either you are one hundred percent for them or you are anti-Semitic. Well I guess I have answered your question.

Q: You left the desk in 1957 and you did what?

BLACKISTON: I went to the Arabic language school in Beirut.

Q: How did you find the training at the language school?

BLACKISTON: I thought it was pretty good. I wished I had been younger when I had gone there. We had a guy named Frank Rice who was the head of the school and we all liked him quite well. Incidentally in that group were Cleo Noel, Curt Moore, and Earl Russell, all of whom have been killed, Les Pope, who died of a choking accident. We were for the most part quite a congenial group. We were in an apartment building and the lease ran out; Frank Rice had been appealing to the Administrative Officer of the Embassy to do something about it. He sent a cable, I don't know why they didn't catch it, which said something to the effect of, "Closing Arabic language school. Lease is out, no place to go." Well this gets to the Department and gets to Loy Henderson's desk, Under Secretary of Administration, and I guess somebody just blew a fuse. They sent out the head of the

Library of Congress

Foreign Service Institute, or head of Language Training I guess it was, and they removed Rice from his position. Now they didn't have anybody to run the school, so they look around and they name me as head of the school! Student and head. In the meantime we have this civil war breaking out in Lebanon. The Ambassador is Rob McClintock, and one thing leads to another and he tells us to close the school. They assign us to all sorts of things, even answering the switchboard. Among other things we were sent out in cars to go around Lebanon; we had two-way radios in the trunk, which was a silly thing to do, to check ostensibly on the situation of Americans—a lot of Lebanese that had gone back to their villages. We had all these cards with the names, and on one occasion I and Les Pope, who was a black officer, were driving east of Tripoli. We crossed the Nahr Barin, which is the Cold River, and I think we were in the wrong area. I knew we were in the wrong area when I tell you this story. We come up out of this valley and there is this guy sitting under an olive tree with a bandoleer on and a coke container—you know one of those things they sell coke out of; ice chest—and a field telephone. To get the situation in Lebanon at this time—we had UN observers, a different outfit, because of the charge that the Syrians were infiltrating people, communists. In the meantime in Iraq Nuri Said had been killed, King Faisal had been killed; Jordan and Iraq had been in a union and they had killed some of the Ministers from the joint government. So the place was sort of falling apart.

Q: We are talking about the killing of Nuri Said and the King, July 14, 1958.

BLACKISTON: Yes. Anyway there was the government and the opposition; the opposition wasn't all Muslim; there were Christians in Muarida as they call it. Where we were was where there was this Christian opposition, in the Zagharta District which is a bloody area of ex-President Suleiman Franjeh, who was a murderer, he shot people in a church. This guy stops us and I gave him a song and dance in Arabic that we were looking for people, American citizens. "Well you can't go on," he said, "you've got to check with the commandant." Then he looks at Les and says, "Is he really an American." "He's really American," I say and get to talking with this guy and it turns out, he was fairly old, that he

Library of Congress

had been in the US Army with Pershing chasing Pancho Villa in Mexico. All these crazy things happened in Lebanon. Some guy comes down from the “commandant” and we go up to his village; the commandant has a real nice house and he is a lawyer, French trained. All these guys with weapons are sitting around the room; they didn't like the looks of us at all. But they offered us some tea and cookies and finally let us go. I could tell more about this, but would you like me to tell you about the American landings?

Q: Yes.

BLACKISTON: I played a direct role in that. Let me back up here: there was the Eisenhower Doctrine, Chamoun was the President; to get American intervention it had to be authorized by the Lebanese cabinet. So Chamoun writes up this authorization which is signed by three or four cabinet members, not all the cabinet, and sends it over to the Embassy; it is in hand written Arabic which is pretty hard to read unless you are good at it. They send it down to the Arabic language school to be translated—exactly what does it say? We xerox this thing and cut it up into pieces and one group of students take one piece and another group another piece and so forth. Of course we had to ask the instructors from time to time, without telling them what we were doing, what does this word mean; it really was funny. We finally get the thing translated. Then the marines land, they come up...I mean they come up off the coast off the airport. The head of the Lebanese Army is a General Shehab, that is a famous family in Lebanon that have been everything from Christians to Muslims to Druze; he's a Christian at this time. Now there is a defection in the so-called armor of the Lebanese Army and they have got these tanks lined up on the airport road; they are lined up just beyond the corniche. So I am asked to go out there with Bob Funseth, he was in the political section but he wasn't an Arabist, and an assistant army attaché, and I was the Arabist. So we go out and I met this tank, it is sitting up in the road there just off the corniche where you turn, not far from the sea. We want to find out what these guys are going to do because the marines are getting ready to come in, hit the beach. So I climb up on this tank and I talk to this guy and give him a song and dance about how we are here to protect the sovereignty of Lebanon—that was the line.

Library of Congress

He says, "I know, I know, my cousin is in the American Navy." So I said, "What are your orders?" "Oh," he says, "we get them from the Qiaba," that's the headquarters. "But what are they?"...I never got it out of him. That was the end of that. So we go on down and here comes this line of Marines in amphibious vehicles coming with some officers in jeeps, all with bullet proof vests—I've got my seersucker suit on. We stopped this column, the assistant army attach# was with us, coming from the airport—there is a refugee camp alongside the airport on the east side and these people are not happy. So we stop them and tell them they can't go on because we don't know but what the Lebanese Army ahead might fire. So we stopped. You know Bob Murphy was sent out there.

Q: He was the troubleshooter in North Africa and was called "Mr. Foreign Service."

BLACKISTON: Yes, like Loy Henderson. Well I guess they weren't too sure about McClintock, so...

Q: One got the feeling that McClintock was opposed to the landings, wasn't he?

BLACKISTON: That I don't know; I was in the language school and played no role other than what I am telling you. I wasn't functioning in the Embassy though the language school was in the Embassy. Maybe that was the reason, maybe you are right. Anyhow they sent Bob Murphy out there. The next thing that happened was that McClintock and Murphy and General Shehab go into this house down the road; I wasn't there, I was a hundred yards down the road and we're stopped there waiting to see what would happen. In the meantime there is this refugee camp and the column is sort of sitting there. I said, "Look, I think you ought to move some armor or something over here off the side of the road to give you a little protection because of this refugee camp." Well I don't think they thought much of this coming from a civilian, so they didn't do anything. After this powwow of about an hour they seemed to resolve this problem. McClintock goes back to the Embassy and I think he told the reporters that he led the troops into the port, but that's not true; the troops

Library of Congress

led themselves into the port and they took up various positions around the city. That was the end of that. Now I could go on about another aspect. Is this interesting?

Q: This is interesting, yes.

BLACKISTON: I also made a trip way down into southern Lebanon, the same idea as the one I told you about into northern Lebanon. That's a Shia'a area, as it is today. But the Shia'a were really downtrodden, that was part of the problem; they weren't getting any schools or development. There were a lot of Americans living there; they had grocery stores in Detroit or something and they were very friendly to us, no problem at all. Of course that is dangerous area today. So much for that.

Another situation was that we heard there were some missionaries north of Tripoli. Tripoli is in the northern part of the country and there is a big refugee camp outside of Tripoli, and we heard that the refugees were all out on the road raising hell, blocking the road so that the missionaries couldn't get to Beirut. They wanted to get to Beirut. There were two seismic testing ships—oil exploration testing; they weren't big, they might have been 150 feet long—that had been out in the Gulf. They were going wherever they were going and they put into Beirut. The Ambassador apparently asked for authority to commandeer them and that is exactly what he did. The idea was that I and an officer named Silver would go on one of these ships and we would try to make contact with the missionaries and bring them back on the ship to Beirut. So we steam up the coast and go to Al Mina, Mina means port in Arabic; it is where the IPC (Iraq Petroleum Company) refinery is. I am a little vague on this but for some reason we picked up some IPC employees that were boatmen and I am a little vague as to what we did. We must have gone up the coast, maybe pulling these boats behind us. I get in the boat with the boatmen and we row towards the shore. We approach the shore and there are all these guys with rifles standing on the beach warning us off. So we saw that this was not very profitable so we go back. I have sort of forgotten how this happened but someplace along the line I get into Tripoli, find that the missionaries have gotten through this roadblock and are up there in Tripoli. As it seems there is no

Library of Congress

problem driving the road back to Beirut I charter some taxis, I think we had seven or eight people. We steam on down the road, sending the ships back by sea, and we all drive up to the Embassy. In the meantime, McClintock apparently has told the press about this sea rescue and I come back with the missionaries in the taxis. He was not happy.

Q: I think that McClintock did enjoy publicity.

BLACKISTON: Oh God! Well I'll tell you about the dog. He had this poodle. Also—nobody had ever done this—we had this guy, a Christian named Tewfiq, who was a kuwass. Do you know what a kuwass is?

Q: Sort of a major-domo?

BLACKISTON: In the Turkish times the consul had to have some protection; obviously he wouldn't want to be disturbed by the hoi polloi. So when he walked into the city the kuwass walked ahead. He wore these baggy pants and the fez and he had this staff—we had a couple of staffs in Jerusalem; frankly I think one Ambassador stole one, not in Jerusalem but elsewhere. They were very nicely done—from Turkish times—of course we didn't use them then. Anyway he would walk ahead and say, "Make way, here comes the American Consul!" Tewfiq wore this crazy costume that dated from Ottoman times, and McClintock would take him with him everywhere he went, including this little poodle. On Lebanon Independence Day he took the dog with him in the reviewing stand for the troops. Well dogs—Islam...

Q: Dogs are considered unclean.

BLACKISTON: Even the Christians there thought it was inappropriate. So he got a lot of bad publicity for that. There were so many funny things. There was one thing that just occurred to me. I think as far as Lebanon is concerned I might say that what happened next is that the problems in Lebanon diminished, thanks in large measure to the role of Bob Murphy. The shooting was small potatoes compared to what has happened in

Library of Congress

Lebanon in more recent years. However, there was a lot of shooting and there were some really terrible things that occurred. For instance there was what we called the ABC store, it was sort of like a Woolworth's, in downtown Beirut. Some of the opposition must have hijacked a Pepsi-Cola truck, and they drove this truck up, this is in downtown Beirut, in front of the ABC store; they had it loaded with kerosene and some explosive device. They jumped out and set this thing off and it engulfed the store with flames and burned a whole bunch of the shoppers and clerks. They did a similar thing to a streetcar that blew up people all over the place. They have in Lebanon, and in many other Arab countries but particularly in Lebanon, a very peculiar practice if there is an accident. For instance there is a rail line going north, the train probably doesn't come but once a day but somehow a truck or something will happen to cross this track on the road going north to Tripoli and collide with the train; maybe a bus or something and people are killed. The bus driver runs up in the hills; he is afraid of blood feud revenge until his family can get in touch with the guy and work out some arrangement. A lot of that happened when I was there.

Anyway, I was transferred to Tunis as head of the economic section. We were going to leave one day but there was another new problem with some Christians strewing tacks on the road going up the mountain. I was going to go to Damascus and up to Aleppo; I was going to drive. My wife had been evacuated to Italy; the family was in Positano. So we had to delay it for one day; ultimately I did drive it with a friend of mine. We drove all through Turkey and Greece and Yugoslavia and on into Italy and down to pick up my family; then down the boot to take a ferry to Palermo where we put the car on a ship and sailed for Tunis. Shall we stop?

Q: All right.

Q: Here we go. Today is September 15th, 1992 and we are going on with this interview. We had you getting into Tunis, where you served from 1958 to 1960. What were you doing in Tunis?

Library of Congress

BLACKISTON: I was head of the economic section. I arrived there, as I described in the earlier interview, by ship from Palermo having driven from Beirut to the toe of Italy and then ferrying across to Palermo. At that time the major development was, of course, the Algerian rebellion against the French which was going on full bore. While I was there there was an attack on the Tunisian border town of Sakiet Sidi Youssef.

Q: This was a major political incident.

BLACKISTON: It was. The FLN, the Front for National Liberation for Algeria, was using this as a staging area. The French had built an electrified fence along part of the Tunisian-Algerian border, but this had been breeched of course. Bob Blake, head of the political section, and I and some others went there to see what this town looked like after this attack. It had been leveled; I guess you would call it a village. The first Ambassador I had when I was there was Lewis Jones, the second was Newby Walmsley. Walmsley had been DCM in Moscow and he was really a Russian expert. There was a big emphasis then on using PL 480 funds to loan to the Tunisian government for the purpose of paying workers in grain to do reforestation and other projects. Tunisia was of importance to us, far outweighing its actual power as an Arab country, because of the fact that Bourguiba was relatively well disposed towards Israel. At least he was not in the forefront of countries that were opposing Israel and this we considered to be a big point in his favor. So Tunisia was favored with a lot of foreign assistance.

Bourguiba had made big efforts to modernize the country and also to liberate women. I think, if I recall, a law was passed prohibiting plural marriage; also he encouraged women to eliminate the veil. This was not entirely successful; most women wore a head covering and they would hold the edge of it in their teeth, which covered part of their face. There were many liberated Tunisian women. There were a number of Tunisian artists who were quite popular and well-known; a lot of their works appeared on Tunisian postage stamps. There was a lot of infighting then in the Neo-Destour party with Bourguiba seeking to maintain his preeminence. There was a lot of self-glorification. He had built his own

Library of Congress

mausoleum down in a place called Monastir, which was his birthplace. It was a domed structure which I saw. Of course, his picture was on postage stamps. I remember one Tunisian, who was teaching me Maghrebian Arabic, asked if pictures of living American presidents were on postage stamps and of course I told him they weren't. You could see what he was getting at. He was known as Al Mujahid Al Kabir, that was his Arabic title which means "The Great Struggler"; and of course he had spent time in Tunisian prisons under the French. He had a French wife at the time; his son, who was later an Ambassador to the United States, is a son of that French wife. He later took on another wife, a Tunisian, after he divorced the French wife who was an older woman.

Q: You were saying that Tunisia was not a very exciting place at the time, but what about this political crisis? Were you privy to whether we were leaning on the Tunisians to cut out their support for the Algerian revolutionaries or were we quietly saying it is a good idea? How were we treating that?

BLACKISTON: Well we had liaison with the FLN representative in Tunis. He was a quite well-known person, so well known that I have forgotten his name. But I knew him. The person who conducted this was Bob Blake, the head of the political section; there were constant interchanges, presumably mostly to get their attitude towards things. We certainly had not taken an official position favoring Algerian independence, I think we were trying to sort of straddle the fence. You may remember that Bobby Kennedy came out favoring Algerian independence.

Q: Well actually Senator Kennedy, John F., came out in about 1958.

BLACKISTON: Yes, that's right. So there was sort of an equivocal position. But we did have close liaison. This FLN representative spoke quite good English, perhaps he had been educated in the United States—he had an American wife, a rather nice looking woman. I think on a couple of occasions when Bob had to be out of town, I was assigned

Library of Congress

to go and convey some point or other to him, but I was not the person; it was the head of the political section.

Q: Were we under attack by the French because our Embassy was being too friendly to this movement?

BLACKISTON: I think they were very suspicious of us. You see at that time the French were in Bizerte, that was a French naval base; ultimately they got the French out, the French had to leave. We were much concerned about that, as to what use that base might be put, but of course nothing really bad happened out of that. Now...I have sort of lost my train of thought here. I can cite an example of where French suspicions came into play. Oil, of course, exists in Algeria and it was being developed in southeast Algeria not too far from the Tunisian border—I beg your pardon because Tunisia doesn't go that far south. It was farther south than the southernmost part of Tunisia. I wanted to go to visit those oil fields and the Embassy was prepared to authorize me to go to see these oil fields but the French turned me down, would not permit me to go. I can't imagine what they were afraid of, but nevertheless they wouldn't permit it.

Q: How were these two Ambassadors, Lewis Jones and Newby Walmsley? How did they run the Embassy?

BLACKISTON: Well Lewis Jones had been to Harvard and the head of the CIA, Station Chief, had been to Harvard and I think they had been there together, as well as my predecessor. Do you want me to cite names?

Q: Sure.

BLACKISTON: Well Frank Coolidge was the CIA Station Chief, and an awfully nice guy; who had been, incidentally, in the French Foreign Legion. Apparently he had gotten out; as rumors had it, this was the time of President Coolidge, somehow through his family's intercession with Coolidge they got him out which is quite unusual. At least that's the

Library of Congress

story. And he was in OSS during the war and as I understand it he was dropped into the maquis. On reflection I don't think he could have been a contemporary with Lewis Jones because I think he would have been older. He was a good friend of ours. His wife was also a Coolidge, they were from Boston. My predecessor was a fellow named Jimmy Burns, and he had been at Harvard and I think he had been a contemporary of Jones. And the number two economic officer that worked with me, Tom Smith, was also from Harvard. So it was very heavy Harvard laden group there. Now as for Newby Walmsley, he came without much knowledge of the Arab world, but Tunisia is a little bit apart. Actually the government officials don't, I guess it is like in Algeria, really speak Arabic, they speak French all the time. And Walmsley's wife was Spanish, she was a great canasta player. He and I got along quite well together; he was very kind to me and I liked him a great deal.

Q: How did the two Ambassadors get along with Bourguiba from your viewpoint?

BLACKISTON: I think they got along okay. Bourguiba, you know, was probably showing some signs of the mental problems which later caused his being deposed. I think he was something of a megalomania; he did have some good ideas. Like so many reformers in the Muslim world, they often don't quite succeed. It has happened in Afghanistan, it has happened with the Shah in Iran, it has happened in other countries; you might even say under Ataturk in Turkey where the rank and file adhere to their religious beliefs and are not prepared to change.

Q: You can go just so far.

BLACKISTON: Yes, that's right.

Q: You left Tunis in 1960 and came back to Washington.

BLACKISTON: Yes. I was in what was then called Near East Economic Affairs.

Q: That was from 1960 to 1964?

Library of Congress

BLACKISTON: Yes. Then I went to Saudi Arabia. But prior to going there I had made a trip out to Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states, Kuwait and Yemen. I think that was when I went to Yemen, that is out from the Department. And that was a very interesting trip. It so happened that I was in the Gulf during the Cuban missile crisis.

Q: In October of 1963.

BLACKISTON: The interesting thing of that, as far as I'm concerned—of course I knew about it while I was there—was that I really didn't get the sense of the seriousness of it. It didn't really occur to me that there might be missiles flying and that this was really a put up, shut up situation, that it was a crisis. You just didn't get that feeling.

Q: I was in Yugoslavia, and frankly I didn't get it as much.

BLACKISTON: Had I been, as I guess many Americans were, I would probably been as nervous as the dickens being out there, worrying about getting back, what might happen to my family and so forth. But I didn't have that feeling, I was probably just living in a fool's paradise.

Q: In NEA what were your main jobs as economic officer?

BLACKISTON: We had a four man unit there. Enoch Duncan was number two, a fellow named Williams headed it. Enoch was also an Arabist; he had been the first consul in Kuwait, incidentally. We dealt with a gamut of economic affairs; my specialty was principally with petroleum. I got to know quite a bit about it and I had a lot of contact with senior officials in the oil companies, because there was at that time—well the Iraq Petroleum Company had already been nationalized—the movement to cancel the concessions that existed. The oil companies were fighting it but of course looking for alternative ways to maintain their position. Like ARAMCO; ARAMCO became a Saudi

Library of Congress

company but with guaranteed offtake for the four constituent companies so it worked out all right. Then you have the situation that had occurred in Iran with Mossadegh.

Anyway I had a lot of contact with senior officials of the oil companies, frequently calling them on weekends over developments. I must say this all gets a little vague to me now. I was sort of the NEA oil guy. Of course we had the Office of Petroleum Affairs and I had a lot of liaison with them and we got along quite well.

Q: Then you went to a major oil producing country, Saudi Arabia. You went to Jeddah where you served from 1964 to 1966. What were you doing there?

BLACKISTON: I was head of the economic section. The Embassy was in Jeddah whereas the capital was in Riyadh. All the Embassies were in Jeddah and the reason for that is that the Hejaz, or the province where Jeddah is located, was considered more liberal than Nejd, which is the province, in central Saudi Arabia, where Riyadh is located. The situation there in Riyadh, we did go up there to Riyadh frequently and call on the ministries, was such that King Faisal didn't feel that he could have the Embassies there because the religious ulema didn't even permit cigarettes to be sold on the street at that time; it was very puritanical. He was afraid of trouble if the Embassies moved there because they would have to make accommodations for the western way of life. Saudi Arabia is not a country that women like; my wife did not like it at all and it is the only country that she didn't like. There is the restriction on driving; my wife did drive surreptitiously, knowing where the policemen were she would avoid them. But every so often there would be a complaint to the Foreign Ministry and it would come down to the Ambassador and he would say, "Now Aprille can't you sort of cool it a bit." That's the way it was.

There was a lot of hypocrisy among the Arabs regarding drinking. We brought in our liquor, I think it came from Singapore or Hong Kong, with falsified invoices. On several occasions we would have parties and we would serve liquor, but the Saudis wouldn't take it overtly; but frequently they would ask for an orange juice or a tomato juice and then if they thought

Library of Congress

they knew you well enough they would say, "Now could you add a little something else to that, add vodka or something?"

Among the most interesting things I did there was to make a very long trip, I think it was about seventeen days, with one Land Rover and a Dodge power wagon with a barrel of extra gasoline. We went up along the Hejaz rail line, past Medina—actually I could see Medina. You know Medina is not...

Q: It is a closed city.

BLACKISTON: It is a closed city. But it so happened that we were up near Mada'in Salih, which incidentally is a Nabatean area similar to Petra in Jordan—these carved tombs all over the area, it's really beautiful. It is too bad that Saudi Arabia is not open for tourism. Along this rail line—at the station in Mada'in Salih there are still boxcars and locomotives, I think some overturned, others partially destroyed, as a result of Lawrence's raiding. Now part of the rail line has been torn up and the rail line now only goes down from Damascus to Ma'an. We were up there and the sun was setting, we were outside of Medina maybe ten miles but there was very good visibility, and I could see the Prophet's Mosque. Then we went across Nafud sand dunes, up to the TAP line, then back through Hail. Well anyhow I had this other guy, a Sudanese Saudi citizen from the Ministry of Agriculture, driving this other vehicle. I had told him to slow down and he kept going over these dunes and finally sailed over one dune and went head first into this dune and bent a tie rod so the vehicle couldn't be controlled. I had the Spanish Ambassador, who had nothing to do and plead with me to take him on this trip, and he unfortunately had an ulcer and had to eat every so often. I would be trying to push on but he had to stop to eat. I don't know but this is getting too...

Q: Well it gives a flavor.

Library of Congress

BLACKISTON: I made another trip down south, similar, where in those days the roads were nonexistent or only main roads like the one up to Medina.

Q: How did the Embassy look on Israel? You must have been getting it all the time from the Saudis on why do you support Israel.

BLACKISTON: Yes, we got it constantly.

Q: What was the feeling towards Israel and its role in the Arab world?

BLACKISTON: Let me answer this by saying that the Saudis have an ambivalent attitude toward this. Sure they support the Palestinians, at least give lip service to it, but they are sort of fearful of the Palestinians. I will give you an example. I was on this long trip that I made down south; I had with me a man from the Ministry of Agriculture named Stambouli who was a Palestinian but a Saudi citizen. There was an exchange, I just overheard part of it and I had to ask him exactly what happened. I can't remember where, it wasn't Jizan, it was someplace else; this person had said to him, this emir, "You have lost your country and you are trying to get us to lose ours," or words to that effect. And he, Stambouli, was absolutely shocked that he was not accepted; and I really don't know what this emir meant by what he was saying. They did indeed castigate us for our support of Israel, on the other hand they looked to us for support and considered that we were their fall-back position and would protect them. You see we had had a SAC base in Saudi Arabia if you remember.

Q: Well at Dhahran.

BLACKISTON: You know that better than I, but King Saud had asked that it be removed. So when I was there we didn't have that, but of course we had the military mission. I went up to Riyadh quite frequently and I knew the head of the military mission. Was Gene Bird...

Q: No.

Library of Congress

BLACKISTON: Not in Dhahran at that time. I knew Zaki Yamani quite well and...

Q: He was the Minister for Oil.

BLACKISTON: Yes, Petroleum Affairs. You know the Saudis would go up to Ta'if in the summer because it was cooler up there. I went up to visit him once because we had worked out a shoran agreement, it was for the delineation of the median line of the gulf to eliminate friction with the Iranians, you know they claim these islands. I was pushing him to agree for us—we were going to conduct the survey and then they would presumably use that as a basis for delineating the median line of the gulf. Which, I guess, transpired; I don't know whether the Iranians adhere to that anymore or not. I went up, he was living there in a tent, and had dinner with him and other people there in Ta'if—you know they go back to their bedouin roots sometimes. Tom Barger was president of ARAMCO, was he there when you were?

Q: Yes.

BLACKISTON: So I knew him quite well. Once we had a dinner with Saud bin Jaluwi, who was the governor of the Eastern Province.

Q: Did you get any feeling in Embassy country team meetings about reports that would come out of Israel? Did you feel that our Embassy there was the tool of Israelis?

BLACKISTON: I think I discussed that in our last session. My impression when I was in Jerusalem was that that was definitely the case. This was related to me by a fairly prominent Ambassador who served in Lebanon. He said to me that he was getting ready to go to such and such a place, he had been told he would be named, and some political appointee in the State Department told him, "As soon as we get the Israeli clearance you are all set." And my impression was that Army attach#s sent to Israel had to be cleared by the Israeli government before they were sent. That was my impression, I may be wrong.

Library of Congress

Q: You then went to Cairo where you served from 1966 to 1967.

BLACKISTON: I was only there ten months, because I got caught in the war.

Q: What were you doing in Cairo?

BLACKISTON: I was head of the economic section, but the head of the AID mission, which wasn't very big at that time, was the Economic Counselor and my boss.

Q: After the Aswan Dam business it was all going down hill.

BLACKISTON: This was much after that, of course, but we did have some AID mission; and the person who was head of that was also the Counselor for Economic Affairs. But I was head of the economic section under him; actually his main focus was on AID so I was more or less running that part of the show. Things were going down hill. Luke Battle was the Ambassador and I remember I had been someplace on a trip—Gene Bird and I went to Gaza about a week before the Israeli attack and that was fairly interesting—I came back and went into his office. Luke was dictating a cable because he had just come from a meeting with Nasser, I think that was his last meeting with Nasser, and he showed me what had been said. I saw him just the other day, he sat at the same table at DACOR with Andy Killgore and me; he knows everybody, he is really the establishment.

BLACKISTON: Dave Nes was the DCM, and Luke was transferred. Nes saw what the situation was and was imploring the State Department to send a career officer with Arab experience to Cairo because of the tenseness of the situation. I gather that Nes got himself into some trouble over this. Dick Parker was head of the political section and he had been sent to Yemen, you know the Egyptians were in Yemen, he was sent down there.

Q: There had been an AID problem with the Egyptians...

Library of Congress

BLACKISTON: Oh yes, two AID persons had been arrested and he was trying to get these guys out. I remember he sent a cable saying, "It is time for me to go, because my barraka is going," meaning my luck charm; so he was brought back. I was talking to him about this some months ago because he is writing a book about the 1967 war, part of it has already appeared in the Middle East Journal. When Parker was in Yemen that was the time that Nasser called up two divisions and moved them across the Suez Canal into the Sinai; this was the time when they asked for the UN troops to withdraw. I remarked, and I told Dick Parker this because he asked me something about it in connection with his book, that I had seen Egyptian troops around standing guard and I said, "Well they don't look too bad." Then when I saw this exercise of moving these troops through Cairo and on across at Qantara—there is no bridge there, you know; there is a ferry at Qantara, which really means crossing—with vehicles breaking down all over the place, trucks unhooked from their artillery pieces, little boys pushing these trucks, oil coming out of the crankcases, I said to myself this is going to be a disaster if this ends up in war.

As you know, the morning of the attack, June whatever it was, I had come into the Embassy and I saw some shrapnel on the ground and I asked Gene Bird, who had been there a little bit earlier, what was going on. He said, "I think the war has started," or he said that it had started. By this time the Israelis probably had knocked out most of the Egyptian air force. So then the situation was pretty tense. The Egyptians asked for the cease fire and then they broke relations with us. I had been down at the Embassy—I lived out in Ma'adi which is a suburb where many of us lived—and I was home packing up some stuff because I thought we were going to be thrown out. Nasser had made a speech in which he said he was resigning, but this was all a put-up job because immediately the mob started surging through the streets of Cairo and elsewhere demanding that he not resign. I had watched his speech on television. Out near Ma'adi, across a canal, there was an Egyptian military installation and all of a sudden all this gunfire started off, shooting up in the air—I guess it was anti-aircraft or artillery—not far from where I was. So I called the Embassy and I said, "Can you hear all this?" Well this was part of the exercise to generate

Library of Congress

public concern and so forth, it had been orchestrated. Anyhow they told me, "You have to come down to the Embassy because we have to leave tonight." Dick Parker had asked me to pick up some silverware from his house, which I did. I had a dog and I took the dog with me and drove down to the Embassy. The city was blacked out. We threw all our suitcases and everything into this truck, I guess it was an Embassy truck, an open stake truck. Then we had to go to the train station; this was in the middle of the night, so we moved down in a bus to the train station. A bunch of soldiers from this defeated army were lying around in the main Cairo train station sleeping, so you had to step over their bodies to get on the train. I think we sat there for a while but finally the train pulled out; we were going to Alexandria, of course. In the meantime the Embassy in Athens had chartered a ship. By this time it was early morning, and before we got to Alexandria it was light. On the way the Egyptian peasants, as the train passed by, would hold up their shoes with the soles pointed toward us—which is an Arab insult—so that we could see this from the train. It was all pretty ridiculous to us. When we got to the ship terminal there were no porters, they had purposely been told not to help us, so everybody had to...we formed a human chain and put the bags on the ship. I may just parenthetically say that the person who was sent to be Ambassador, Dick Nolte, never got a chance to be Ambassador, never presented credentials because the Israeli attack had taken place. Nolte, Dick Parker and I were sailing on the Nile the night before the attack took place. Parker had a boat with Gene Bird, so we got on this ship, ultimately we sailed; we had some news correspondents, some private citizens. Just outside the territorial limits two American destroyers picked us up. We sailed on and then one boiler broke down; I think we had one boiler working, but we were vastly delayed getting into Piraeus. Everybody was then accommodated by the Embassy in Athens.

Q: When the war started what were you all doing in the Embassy? What type of thing were you doing during this six-day war?

Library of Congress

BLACKISTON: What were we doing? Well we surely weren't going about normal business—I guess we were doing whatever we were asked to do, I just can't remember.

Q: You got into Piraeus, you had only been in Cairo for six months...

BLACKISTON: Ten months. Oh, I might say that the families had been evacuated before. My wife and my children were in Athens.

Q: You then got reassigned to Amman?

BLACKISTON: We had to stay around there because we had this large number of people you see; and there were people from other Embassies where relations had been broken. So there was a big personnel problem in finding places. Anyhow, I was sent to Amman.

Q: What was the situation in Amman?

BLACKISTON: First we had this large number of new refugees; these were people who had been in what was then the west bank and who had fled as a result of the 1967 war. One of those was my cook, Yussef Salman, who had quite a nice house outside of Jerusalem, in that part of the corridor that was the west bank, and had just put in thousands of dinars in new furniture. Fortunately for him he had a house in Amman. The Israelis were flying over Jordan all the time, violating Jordanian air space, and creating more tension. There had been some Jordanians over on the east bank of the Jordan that had been hit in a bus by napalm and a number of people were killed there. Of course, obviously not everyone fled the west bank, but my cook did and he had quite a nice house. I asked him, I said, "Yussef why did you leave, why didn't you stay put and keep your house?" I never got a clear idea; I am not sure that he was actually threatened by anything like expulsion, but it was probably a mass psychology that took the least educated people and caused them to flee. Now these people were in new refugee camps, and I was involved in getting tents from Pakistan, which made tents. We bought them with US owned Pakistani rupees. I remember talking to the Minister of Reconstruction and Development,

Library of Congress

Hazem Nusseibeh, who came from a very well-known family, who said the refugees didn't want to use the tents because there was a psychology that if you go into a tent then you are going to be like a refugee. But they had no other place to go, they had to go into the tents; so ultimately we did set up the tents. We were trying to make publicity shots of the turning over the tents and you know it is ridiculous when in essence we had played a role in the whole fiasco.

Q: Were you there at the Black September movement?

BLACKISTON: I'll tell you what happened. Arab suspicion was very great; I was told that there was a rumor that I had maps. I did have maps that were just the standard maps of Jordan put out by the British cartographer's office, and they read something into this. In any event there was a rumor which the CIA had picked up, or the Jordanians had told it to them, that there was going to be some sort of assassination attempt. So for a period of time I had some protection. Then, shortly after I left, a really tragic thing happened. The assistant Army attach#—I was not there, it happened just a month or so after I left when this Black September thing started—was a FAS student, well they train army officers in various esoteric languages including Arabic and they had it up in Beirut. He had been a FAS student, spoke Arabic and had a very pretty wife. Some people came to the door and wanted to see him and he wouldn't open the door and was trying to protect his family, wife and kids I think; he was standing behind the door, the front door was locked, and they shot him through the door and killed him. Then we had the invasion of the Intercontinental Hotel where they took it over.

Another thing that happened, Bob Fisher and I, he was the head of UNRWA for Jordan, had gone down to Karami Camp. Karami Camp—UNRWA Camp—is in the Jordan Valley. There had been some infiltrators from Karami Camp into the west bank; the Israelis had retaliated in a massive way and the inhabitants of the camp, well the PLO—the place was heavily armed, we noticed this when we went down and it was not a healthy thing for outsiders to go into those camps—defended the camp and repelled the Israelis. They

Library of Congress

captured one or two Sherman tanks and one of them they had down in the main square in Amman. It was a very tense sort of situation; I went down to look at this tank but I didn't hang around. That was the situation there and then it got worse. L. Dean Brown came there as Ambassador and then there was the Black September thing and Brown had a terrible time. But I had left before he arrived.

Q: In your time it was Harry Symmes. I wonder if you would talk about his relationship...

BLACKISTON: Well he didn't like King Hussein; didn't like the Hashemites for reasons which I never quite understood. He knew whom he was being accredited to when he went there. I think this culminated at a luncheon at the residence which I was a guest with a number of Jordanian cabinet ministers. I can't remember the dialogue but I do remember that I was shocked to hear what Harry Symmes was saying in attacking the Jordanian government. It wasn't long after that—actually I was asked about this back in Washington—that the King asked that he be recalled.

Q: I think the culminating incident was that he recommended that Joseph Sisco, or somebody, not come to Jordan because there had been demonstrations and he felt that the Jordanian government could not give him good protection.

BLACKISTON: That is right. I am glad you mentioned that because I had forgotten that. That is true. He indicated that the Jordan government couldn't provide protection to Sisco and this infuriated the Jordanians. So it was a culmination of a number of things.

Q: What was the feeling in the Embassy about King Hussein at that time?

BLACKISTON: I don't think we had any...he was a rational sort of person, he was certainly no fanatic, he had served our interests so we always considered Jordan to be a linchpin in the Middle East; he was a force of moderation. His problem was that not all his population was prepared to be...many Palestinians there hated his guts. And of course the population

Library of Congress

of Jordan, west bank aside, was about fifty percent or more Palestinian. This is what has lead the Israelis to say, "Palestine is Jordan." What you said about Sisco, that is true.

Q: You left there about 1969 and then went to Calcutta. What were you doing in Calcutta? You were there for sixteen months.

BLACKISTON: I was the Deputy Principal Officer and for a long period of time, one six months and one some other length, I was acting head there. Everything you have ever heard about Calcutta is true. It has a certain charm in a sort of macabre way. It is really human degradation at its utmost but on the other hand they have a racetrack, all sorts of clubs and social life. This is all going on in the midst of hundreds of thousands of people sleeping on the streets. Interestingly enough, contrary to our street people here, many of these people have some sort of job; they are collecting rags, collecting this or that, they are doing something.

Q: What were the main purposes of our Consul General?

BLACKISTON: Calcutta has gone down since then, but it was a large consulate. Our consular district comprised the states of West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, and Assam, and Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland, and states like that. It was well over 100 million people. Calcutta, and our consular district, was a center of the iron and steel industry; not in Calcutta, but in our district, in Bihar. Calcutta is the center of the jute industry; also there is a lot of manufacturing. We had American firms there; for instance, Union Carbide made batteries and carbon black and things like that, Remington made typewriters there. There were all sorts of things produced there. Of course it was a port and had been the capital of India until 1912; it had a lot of manifestations of the Raj still around—stately mansions that had deteriorated with a lot of people living in them, maharajahs' palaces and such. So in a way it was quite interesting and I had the opportunity to travel around India a great deal. We were the principle post reporting on the iron and steel industry, jute, and tea grown up in Assam. There were a number of other products for which our district was important.

Library of Congress

Also it was a listening post for developments in Bhutan, which later was admitted to the United Nations, and Sikkim, which was nominally independent but which ultimately India occupied. As you probably know the Gyalmo of Sikkim was Hope Cooke who was the adopted daughter of Ambassador Selden Chapin. We knew her, she came to Calcutta—a lot of these people including the Bhutanese royal family would come down, people from Nepal, they all have houses down there. They come down for the horse racing season because there was this big race track, so we did have contact with them. Sir Edmund Hillary would come through there, we met him. A lot of fairly interesting people.

Q: What were our relations with the Bengali government? This was the time when the Vietnam War was going strong and we were pretty cool toward the Indian government.

BLACKISTON: We were having trouble all the time. We were having demonstrations literally daily. There would be a big mob at the maidan, which is sort of like Central Park. There was a joke from Dick Davies, who was the first consul general when I was there—we had a baseball team my son played on, down at one end of the maidan there would be a big demonstration and people up here would be playing baseball—the joke was “well that's down there.” India has three communist parties; there is the Communist Party of India, which was the initial party and founded by British communists, then there is the CPI-M, Marxist, and then the CPI Marxist-Leninist. That last group are Maoists and they had conducted some assassinations of landowners in a certain district of West Bengal, up in the north, from which initially they took the name Naxalites. They cut off the heads of these people. There was tremendous turbulence in West Bengal. The head of the CPI-M was a guy named Jyoti Basu who now is the Chief Minister of West Bengal; he's a communist. His father, he told me once, studied in the United States. He was not an unpleasant guy. The Bengalis—there were a lot of fairly wealthy, social, people who didn't seem to feel horrified that they could have a communist government. They seem to be able to work around it, live and let live. That was the situation. After I retired, for some years I escorted leader grantees around, and I escorted the Mayor of Calcutta and his wife, it was just

Library of Congress

three days that he was here, and he is a communist too. And his name is also Basu; same name, a common one in Bengal, she is undoubtedly Bengali, that was murdered here by the carjacker.

We had to get permission from the Indian government to go to Assam; they never let us go to Nagaland. I was with Ambassador Keating and Dick Viets in Shillong at a dinner party at the governor's residence with the former Indian Ambassador to the United States, his name was Nehru. I don't think he was related to the Nehrus but the same name. He had a Romanian-Jewish wife as I remember; he was then the Governor of Assam. Ambassador Keating said that he would like to go to Nagaland. The Governor said, "You will never get to go to there." The situation in India is that there is a Governor of each state who is a figurehead except when the local legislature can't form a government and then they have what is known as "President's rule" and he names a person to take over. It may have been that at that time that was the situation in Assam and he was Governor. Keating was taken back by this and tried to get an indication of the reason. The Nagas were originally headhunters but most of them had been converted by American missionaries, Methodists, and they were favorably disposed to the United States. But the Indians, including Mrs. Nehru's P.P., had it in their brain that somehow we were working with the Nagas to get them to separate from India. And this happened time after time after time in one form or another; we were always being charged with working for a breakup of India.

It happened in another instance. In Madras, which is another consular district—incidentally, Tom Recknagel was the Consul General down there; we work together in the Smithsonian, in Armed Forces History—we built a very large consulate general with a USIA Library in the same building. I personally would never put a library in...

Q: Because they tend to burn them down.

BLACKISTON: You have got it. I would never...and I played a role when I was in charge and they talked about putting the USIS library in the consulate general in Calcutta. I said,

Library of Congress

“No way, we are going to turn this place into a fortress and we are not going to have the USIS library.” You see when I was in charge there we had two bombs, one in the visa section and one in the library. They had used batteries and an explosive charge with an alarm clock and put it up behind a couch and set fire to the room; it didn't do too much damage. This consulate general was quite a large building. Madras is the capital of Tamil Nadu, the state of the Tamils. The Tamils do have something of a separatist tendency in India, but they are also the ones that revolted in Sri Lanka and from Tamil Nadu they had been given support. It was said that the reason we built this building was that when Tamil Nadu separates it will be our Embassy. What I am trying to convey here is this high suspicion of the Indians that makes it very difficult to deal with them.

I can go on about this because I think that this is fairly important. You could get on quite well with the Indian people, the businessmen and everything, but particularly in the central government—it must be a legacy of this guy named Krishna Menon who hated our guts and who must have stashed that Foreign Ministry and other things with all sorts of crypto-communists and left-leaning, difficult types—so I found that many Indian government officials were not very pleasant to deal with. I traveled a lot in India—it was said that in the partition India got the civil service and Pakistan got the army. I have talked with Indian civil servants—the Indian civil service was considered a really elite group but I have had current Indian civil servants tell me, I think one in Manipur, that the standard had gone down.

Q: Well I am sure it has, it is inevitable.

BLACKISTON: The interesting thing is that they inherited a system from the British and they continued it. It is a system whereby the district commissioner is a sort of local king. He does everything; he is a magistrate, he is head of the police, he is the development officer, he is everything.

Q: You left Calcutta in 1971 and came back to Washington?

Library of Congress

BLACKISTON: I came back and was assigned as an NEA advisor at the twenty-fifth General Assembly up in New York. And guess who was Ambassador there? George Bush, although I only met him once or a couple of times. I was just there three months and it was a fairly frustrating exercise, we were completely in bed with the Israelis, and I played no real role. That place ought to be cleaned out, even today I think. And then I went back to India and back here in the Office of Environmental Affairs until I retired.

Q: You retired when, in 1975?

BLACKISTON: Yes.

Q: In Environmental Affairs what was your main...

BLACKISTON: For a period of time, when I was brought back, we were getting ready for the 1972 Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. They had formed what they called the Secretary's Advisory Committee for the UN Conference on the Human Environment, and it was headed by Senator Howard Baker.

Q: The Senator from Tennessee.

BLACKISTON: Yes. They had on it everybody from the President of General Motors, or the Chairman of the Board of General Motors, to Dennis—I can't remember his name, the founder of Earth Day—and Jules Bergman who was a science reporter for ABC; all sorts of people of such disparate backgrounds. I think it was Bergman who said, and I agree, that the likelihood of this group ever coming to any consensus is nil. I was the head of the administrative aspect of it, I have forgotten what title I had. It is obvious that this was not the happiest moment of my life. Howard Baker wanted to establish his environmental credentials, this was the most foolish thing I ever heard of, he wanted to go out to Africa, to Addis Ababa — this was before the communists—to speak to the Organization of African Unity on the environment. I think the Embassy had to crank up some people, they weren't

Library of Congress

in session, to hear this talk to presumably an almost empty chamber. It was just a farce. I wasn't there.

Q: I would like to thank you very much for this interesting information.

End of interview